



# *The Inherent Strengths in Kinship Families*

*Facilitator's Guide*  
**Module: Co-parenting**

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# Introduction

*The Inherent Strengths in Kinship Families* is a training series developed by Dr. Joseph Crumbley for kinship caregivers. The series takes a strength-based perspective in outlining different topics that are unique to kinship families and providing strategies for caregivers. The training is designed for a small group setting with a facilitator.

Purpose of each Module's Tasks:

- To review the module's learning objectives by highlighting and summarizing key issues discussed in each video
- To allow caregivers to develop practical approaches for applying the videos content in the provision of permanency, protection well-being of the children in their care

The complete training toolkit consists of six modules. The entire training toolkit can be delivered in a series, or each module can be delivered individually as a stand-alone training. The available modules, recommended in the following order, are:

- Attachment
- Legacy
- Identity
- Healing
- Adaptability
- Co-parenting

Each module includes a facilitator's guide, module video, and caregiver worksheet.

The facilitator's guide includes:

- Module purpose and learning objectives
- Outline of the module
- Optional discussion questions during the video
- Scripts and discussion questions for worksheet activities following the video
- An appendix with the caregiver worksheet and warm-up activity ideas

The videos for each module are about 1 hour in length. To accommodate differing timeframes, each module is split into two 30-minute parts. Part 1 of the videos in each module addresses **why** the attribute being highlighted is a **strength**. Part 2 of the videos explains how the **strength** is used by caregivers in parenting and caring for their children. (The Legacy Module is the only single video that includes both part 1 and 2, and its length is approximately 30 minutes.)

On average, the time for discussion and the caregiver worksheet may match or exceed the length of the video. The facilitator should determine the best format, setting, and timing of the training, which could be delivered online or in-person. It should be noted that the caregiver worksheet is optional and the facilitator can use the questions in the facilitator's guide as a guided discussion. The worksheet can be completed by caregivers after the meeting or as "homework" as well.

The facilitator should adapt the guide to best meet the needs of the current group. There are different methods for viewing each module. For example:

- Watch the entire module and complete interactive activities and discussion after the video
- Pause the video and complete discussion and worksheet as different issues come up throughout the video
- Include discussion during the video and then complete the worksheet after the video

## Tips

### *Module Content*

- You can pause the clip and check-in with the group during the video to gauge caregivers' feelings about the content as well as questions. This also may also help to transition between topics and keep the groups' attention.
- Consider pausing the video and preview activities on the worksheet that goes along with the content introduced in the video

## *Group Discussion*

- Decide the appropriate group discussion set-up. Some options include a discussion with the whole group, discussing in small group (3 – 6 people), or discussing in partners. This format may depend on the size of your group as well as the format (online or in-person).
- If discussing in small groups, it is suggested to reconvene as a big group to discuss responses and questions.

## *Considerations for Online Format*

- If the training is delivered online, it is recommended to mail printed module worksheets to participants for optimal participation and accessibility.
- Encourage participants to keep their camera's on to read nonverbal language of the group throughout the training
- Encourage participants to use headphones when around others and complete the discussion in a private space
- The chat is a great resource to use for comments and discussion, especially during the video.

## **Intended Audience**

Kinship caregivers, or those caring for relatives or family-friends that are not their biological children, are the intended audience of the current modules. The training can also be referenced by professionals looking to learn more on topics related to kinship care.

## **Facilitator Qualifications**

Facilitators should be knowledgeable about family dynamics and mental health, as well as familiar with different systems that affect kinship families. If the facilitator does not have specific knowledge on these topics, they should partner with a co-facilitator and/or local agencies who have worked with kinship families for support.

Additionally, the modules were created with an informational and therapeutic approach. Some content may bring up different emotions, memories, and experiences for caregivers, some of which may be painful or difficult to process. It is left to the discretion and expertise of the facilitator to proactively plan to support caregivers' mental health and wellbeing throughout the module. It may be helpful to have a list of community and mental health resources for further support available.

## **Acknowledgements**

The facilitator's guide and caregiver worksheets were compiled with the expertise of Dr. Angela Tobin, a support group leader and researcher in the field of kinship care.

# Module: Co-parenting

## *Description and Objectives*

This module focuses on how caregivers can facilitate co-parenting with the children's birth parents. Caregivers are provided approaches that utilizes the strengths of common goals and pre-existing relationships between the caregiver, birth parents, and children.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Define co-parenting specific to kinship families
- Identify the strengths of co-parenting in kinship families
- Provide approaches for caregivers to engage and involve birth parents in co-parenting

### **A Note on the Facilitator's Guide:**

This guide provides suggestions for integrating module videos into a group session to provide discussion and caregiver takeaways. It also includes scripts as a guide for introducing topics and questions. All materials are completely flexible. You are encouraged to review module content ahead of time to prepare and tailor them to specific needs of your group. A space for notes can be found in the Appendix. Time considerations should also be taken into account when planning materials and questions to include in the discussion.

See the caregiver worksheet as part of the Appendix to follow along with participants.

### **Materials:**

- Computer
- Projector & speakers (if in-person)
- Module Video
- Facilitator's guide
- Caregiver worksheets

# Module: Co-parenting Part 1

## Warm-Up Activity (Optional)

See Appendix for ideas

## Introduce module topic and video

Script:

*Today we will be talking about co-parenting within kinship families, such as appropriate expectations you can hold as a caregiver, and different roles and involvement roles a birth parent can assume.*

***To preface the video, it is important to point out that there may be times when birth parent involvement or co-parenting is not feasible. Refer to the Appendix on page 20 for an in-depth list of criteria to use when deciding whether or not to co-parent.***

*(Can leave time here for questions and discussion)*

*This video is about 30 minutes long. Important points and notes are on the summary sheet at the end of the Module worksheet so you don't need to worry about writing everything down. However, you can feel free to add additional notes there if you would like.*

*(Optional: We may pause the video for a short time for to answer questions, but will then have a longer discussion for the activity at the end of the video).*



## Play module video

### Optional Questions:

These are places where the video can be paused, and questions can be opened to the group (quick discussion or online chat) for engagement. The facilitator can determine which questions (if any) should be used and length of time spent on questions to ensure there is time for follow-up activity after video.

Video Time	Discussion Questions following along with Dr. Crumbley
7:17	<i>How many of your children are still involved with their birth parents? How many feel the birth parent is still present even if they're not living with you?</i>
12:47	<i>When the children got hurt, who did they go to for comfort? The birth parent or the kinship caregiver? Why do you think this?</i>

## Discussion questions and activities

The worksheet for caregivers that goes along with the questions below is located in the Appendix that you can refer to as you lead the group. However, the worksheet is optional the questions below can be used solely to guide discussion as well.

### Script:

*We are going to transition to a group discussion about different aspects of co-parenting as presented by Dr. Crumbley in the video. You can choose one or both birth parents to think about during these activities. Feel free to share with the group (or a partner). If it is helpful, you can also write ideas on your caregiver worksheet. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, and if you don't have time to answer all of them, that is okay as well.*

Discussion Questions:

### **Parental Roles Activity**

*On your worksheet, you will see a chart representing the different roles birth parents can take as co-parents, with increasing levels of responsibility as numbers increase. Co-parenting is a spectrum and this chart recognizes that a birth parents competency and capacity is different in every situation and this must be considered. In some situations, like we reviewed earlier, it may not currently be feasible. (You can introduce or review these reasons again here).*

*Across the spectrum of roles an important consideration is that birth parents' must first work on themselves and their competencies before they are entrusted with increased responsibilities on the co-parenting spectrum. In this activity, please start by choosing just one birth parent to think about. If you would like, you can repeat this with the other birth parent on your own.*

*Read through the different roles that a birth parent can have and competencies that come with each role- ranging from contact person to provider for a child*

- *Think about the birth parents' current capacity. Circle where you believe the birth parent currently fits for their role in caring for the child on the scale below.*
- *Now we will try to imagine an ideal world. Put a star next to where they would fall on the scale in an ideal world. How much would you like the birth parent to be involved in co-parenting?*

*In Part 2, we will consider what role might be feasible to strive given your family's unique circumstances.*

## Guidelines for Co-parenting

*Now we are going to move toward thinking about the basic guidelines for co-parenting that Dr. Crumbley presented, he gave examples of how some might be adapted or made even more basic to meet the capacity of a birth parent.*

- *What did you think about setting pre-requisites or guidelines presented to birth parents that they must meet in order to participate in co-parenting?*
- *How might these guidelines be adapted to fit the competency of birth parents in your current situation? Feel free to try and adapt one or two of the guidelines.*

## Module summary

Script:

*Today we talked about co-parenting, setting expectations as a caregiver when implementing co-parenting, and different roles a birth parent can take as a co-parent. In part 2, we will continue on with discussion roles and strategies for engaging the birth parent. I recognize this topic may be difficult to discuss and really appreciate everyone being open and sharing their experiences and ideas*

*(As we close out, does anyone have major takeaways or “aha” moments from the session today that they would like to share? Does anyone have any questions?)*

## Facilitator’s notes (optional)



## Module: Co-parenting Part 2

### Warm-Up Activity (Optional)

See Appendix for ideas

### Introduce module topic and video

Script:

*In the Part 1 of the module, we discussed different roles that a birth parent can take as a co-parent and the importance of matching this role with their current competencies. Today we will continue talking about your strength as kinship caregivers to engage birth parents, and ways you can talk to birth parents about their involvement and expectations as co-parents.*

*This video is about 40 minutes long. Important points and notes are on the summary sheet at the end of the Module worksheet so you don't need to worry about writing everything down. However, you can feel free to add additional notes there if you would like.*

*(Optional: We may pause the video for a short time for quick answers, but will then have a longer discussion for the activity at the end of the video).*

### Play module video

### Optional Questions:

These are places where the video can be paused, and questions can be opened to the group (quick discussion or online chat) to the group for engagement. The facilitator can determine which questions (if any) should be used and length of time spent on questions to ensure there is time for follow-up activity after video.

Video Time	Discussion Questions following along with Dr. Crumbley
4:25	<i>What is it that the grandmother felt the father could give the children that she couldn't?</i>
9:50	<i>Why was it important she continued to do it?</i>
12:10	<i>What are reasons birth parents don't want to co-parent with you?</i>
15:55	<i>What gives birth parents power and who gives them power?</i>

## Discussion questions and activities

The worksheet for caregivers that goes along with the questions below is located in the Appendix that you can refer to as you lead the group. However, the worksheet is optional the questions below can be used solely to guide discussion as well.

### Script:

*We are going to transition to a group activity and continue our discussion around co-parenting dynamics and strategies that follow along with Dr. Crumbley's video. You can choose one or both birth parents to think about during these activities. Feel free share with the group (or with a partner). If it is helpful, you can also write ideas on your caregiver worksheet. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, and if you don't have time to answer all of them, that is okay as well.*

*(Consider re-reading 5 reasons co-parenting may not be feasible from part 1 here)*

Discussion Questions:

### **Reflection Questions**

*As we have learned more about the different competencies that go along with the birth parent co-parenting roles, we will transition to a discussion and reflection that adds on to our activity last week.*

- *Considering the reasons co-parenting might be challenging from both yours and the birth parents' perspective, as well as the birth parents' current competencies, think about what might role in co-parenting be feasible to work toward right now. Why did you select this option?*

### **Scripts Activity**

*Dr. Crumbley presented a variety of scripts for discussing birth parents' involvement with the children in your care, and we will focus on these today. Feel free review the scripts and select a few that you feel apply to your own situation. You can practice saying these scripts to yourself or a partner and can tailor the script to your own child and family.*

*You can also write some ideas of how you might approach a conversation with a birth parent based on the co-parenting role that may be feasible for them to work toward. (If you feel it is not feasible to co-parent right with either parent you can think about what would need to change to make contact with the birth parent feasible).*

## **Module summary**

Script:

*Today we talked about co-parenting, your strength as a caregiver in facilitating birth parent involvement, and strategies for discussing co-parenting roles with birth parents. I recognize this topic may be difficult to discuss and really appreciate everyone being open and sharing their experiences and ideas.*

*(As we close out, does anyone have major takeaways or "aha" moments from the session today that they would like to share? Does anyone have any questions?)*

## **Appendix:**

**Caregiver worksheet  
Warm-up activities**

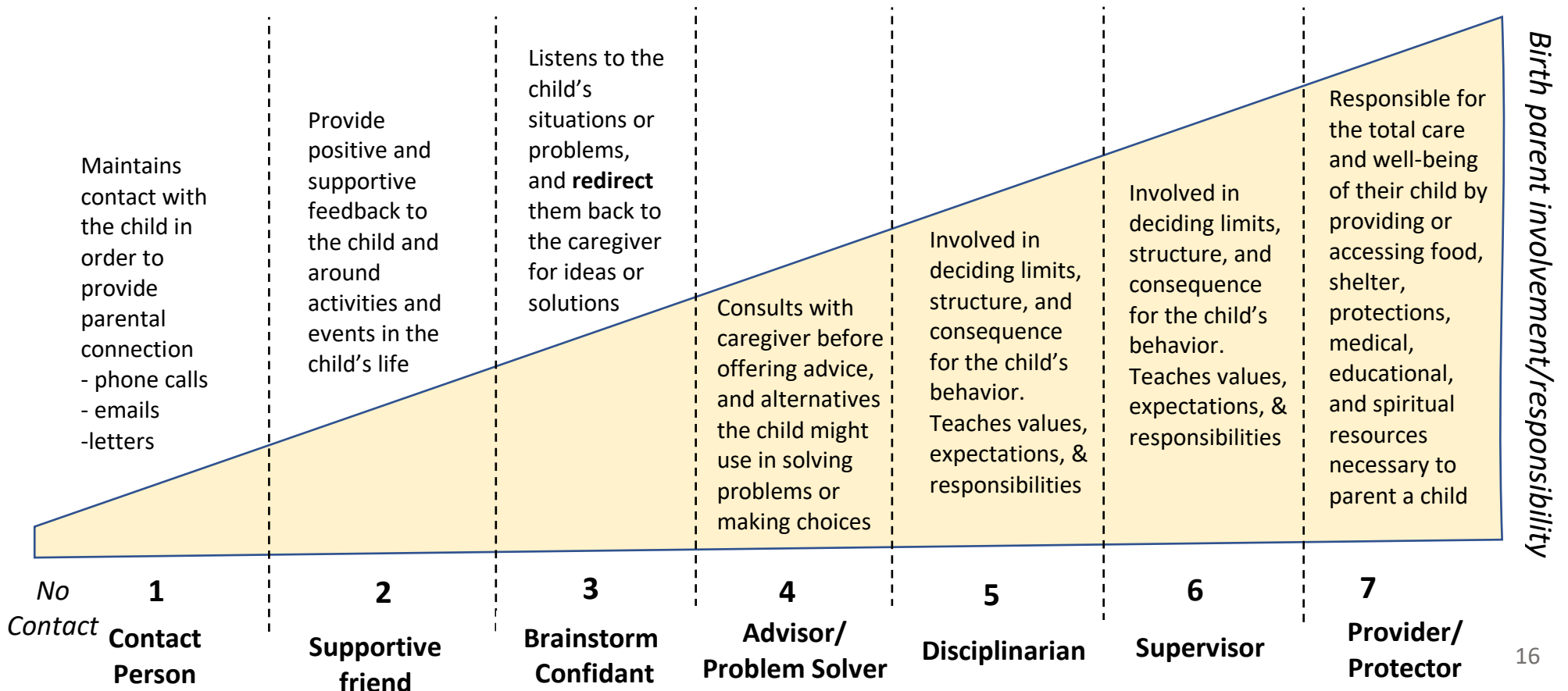


# “Take-Away” Sheet: Co-Parenting Part 1

These questions are guides help connect different topics from the video to your own experience as a caregiver. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers and you do not need answer all of them. It can be a starting point for discussion with other caregivers and/or something to refer to after the sessions.

## Parental Roles for Birth Parents

1. Read through the different roles that a birth parent can have and competencies that come with each role- ranging from contact person to provider for a child.
2. Circle where you believe the birth parent currently fits for their role in caring for the child on the scale below.
3. Put a star next to where they would fall on the scale in an ideal world. How much would you like the birth parent to be involved?



## Guidelines for Co-Parenting

Guideline	How you might adapt it to your situation?
1. Don't belittle or put each other down in front of the child	
2. Don't send messages to each other through the child	
3. Don't change or contradict each other's rules or decisions without contacting each other first	
4. Don't collude or side with the child against each other	

### **"Take-Away" Sheet: Co-Parenting Part 2**

Considering the reasons co-parenting might be challenging from both yours and the birth parents' perspective, as well as the birth parents' current competencies, think about what role in co-parenting might be feasible to work toward right now.  
(You can refer to the chart in part one.)

**Main Takeaways and/or Questions from Module:**

Review the following scripts and strategies you can use in conversations with the child's birth parent. You can tailor these to fit your family situation.

<p><b>Identify common goals with Birth Parents</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“You’re in need of a family for your children until you’re able to care for them again. I want to be the family to care for your children until you’re able to.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Your needing a family and we are wanting to be that family for your children is what we have in common.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I want to be there for my grandchildren, and I also want to be there for you as my son/daughter.”</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Acknowledge the Birth Parents’ Power, Influence, Importance</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“This will be easier if you use your power and influence with the children.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“This will be easier if you decide to accept our help in caring for your children.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“The children need to see your influence and involvement in how they are being raised and cared for.”</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Elicit Birth Parents’ Buy-In (benefits them and the children)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The children can be in a home where you can monitor their safety and well-being. And you can have input into their care.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“You’ll have the time to do what you need to do to show you are able to care for your children.”</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Identify and Dismantle Past Barriers</b></p>	<p><i>“Since the children have been with me, we haven’t been able to be...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Caring, Cooperative, Respectful, _____</i></li> </ul> <p><i>“Because of our past history, we haven’t been able to be...”</i></p>
<p><b>Initiate Positive Interactions</b></p>	<p><i>“From now on, I’m going to be courteous to you, respectful, civil and caring. Because I know you care, I’m going to call and text you on a regular basis about how the children are doing and what they are up to.”</i></p>
<p><b>Establish a Partnership and Guidelines for Co-Parenting</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“We’ve got to be ok for the kids to be ok. We’ve got to be stable in order for the kids to be stable.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“The children need to see us cooperate as a team so they’ll feel safe and stable.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Let’s set up guidelines for handling conflicts that keep the children out of the middle or make them feel confused.”</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Write your own!</b></p>	

# Co-Parenting Summary Sheet

**Co-Parenting** describes the shared responsibility of parenting between the kinship caregiver and the birth parents as well as extended family members.

We have to be okay, in order for the children to be okay

Create expectations for birth parent contact with the children

Use the past to acknowledge what you're going to do differently

## ***The Strengths of Co-Parenting in Kinship Families***

- Pre-existing relationships are the basis for co-parenting between the caregivers and birth parents.
- Both the caregiver and birth parents have a personal relationship with the child.
- The caregiver and birth parents are mutually accessible to each other as family members.
- Children can maintain relationships and support from the caregiver after re-unification with their birth parents.
- Co-parenting can continue if the children are not re-unified with their birth parents.

## ***Pre-Requisites for Birth Parents In Order to Have Involvement***

- Acknowledge/validate your authority as a caregiver
- Give child permission to accept your authority as a caregiver
- Give child permission to bond with and trust you as a caregiver

## ***Example Statements/Dialogue to Birth Parents***

- "It will mean more to the children if you hear you say"...
- "The children need to know that it's okay with you before they will..."
- "Your child will feel better if you say..."
- "The children will listen a lot better to me or their teacher if you tell them..."

## ***Approaches in Co-Parenting***

- Identify common goals
- Acknowledge the birth parents' power, influence, and importance
- Elicit the birth parents' buy-in
- Identify and dismantle past barriers
- Establish a partnership as co-parents
- Acknowledge the birth parents' losses and your willingness to support them

# Criteria for Deciding on Whether to Co-Parent in Kinship Families

- 1. Is the Birth Parent emotionally and physically stable enough to co-parent?**
  - physically accessible/approachable/presentable to their children
  - able to keep appointments
  - lucid, communicative, and able to be interactive with their child
  
- 2. Is the Birth Parent able to accept their roles and guidelines, provided as partners in shared parenting?**
  - accept the loss and grief associated with new roles
  - prioritize the child's needs over their own needs and discomfort
  - can avoid making the child feel guilty or feel the need to support or console the birth parent because of their role
  
- 3. Is the Birth Parent able to not triangulate the child?**
  - avoid undermining or competing with the Caregiver's authority
  - avoid sabotaging the child's relationship with the Caregiver
  - willing to learn how to use their influence to minimize the child's confusion or triangulation
  
- 4. Is the Caregiver able to accept a co/shared parenting relationship with the Birth Parent?**
  - avoid undermining or competing with the Birth Parent
  - accept the Birth Parent's role
  - willing to learn how to partner with the Birth Parent and not confuse or triangulate the child
  
- 5. Are Caregivers and Birth Parents able to be in compliance with any legal guidelines or stipulations?**
  - visitation order
  - restraining or protection orders
  - termination of parental rights
  - permanency proceeding

**6. Are the Caregiver and Birth Parent able to attend joint meetings, when necessary, with the child to provide an emotionally and physically safe space for the child, Caregiver, and Birth Parent?**

- compartmentalize pre-existing history and current personal feeling
- make the child feel they are the focus of attention
- willing to learn behaviors, communication, and problem- solving approaches that create safe spaces for the child

**7. Is the child emotionally ready for co/shared parenting?**

- any indication of trauma prior to, during, or after contacts with birth parents, family, and siblings
- any indications of resistance or hesitations about contact with birth parents, family, and siblings
- any sabotaging of contacts and parenting by the child

## Resources for Warm-Up Activities

### Feelings “Check-in” with visual

- Caregivers can describe how they are feeling using a visual aid as guidance
- Simple feelings wheel (see next page)
- Emotion faces:
  - <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheet/printable-emotion-faces>

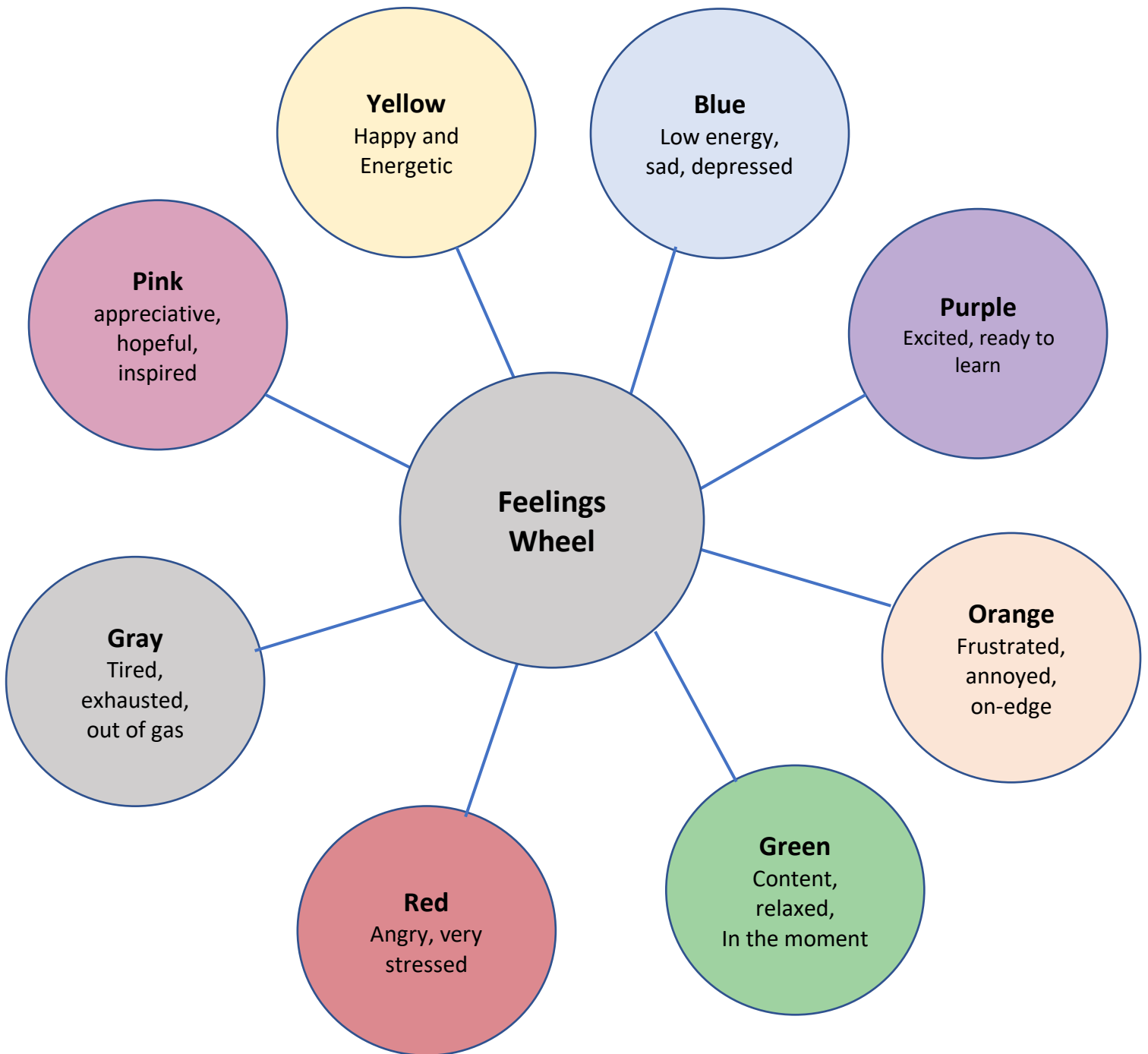
### “Get to Know You” Introduction

- Have each caregiver share their name, how many children they are caring for, how the children are related to them, etc
- Include an “out of the box question” such as...
  - Favorite memory from childhood or adulthood
  - 3 words they would use to describe themselves
  - Favorite activity to do with the child in their care

### Positive Affirmations

- Group leader can read and display multiple positive affirmation statements
- Ask caregivers to choose the affirmation they needed most this week and explain why
- Websites with printable positive affirmations:
  - <https://morganharpnichols.com/blog/30-affirmations-free-phone-wallpapers>
  - <https://thewellnesssociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Affirmation-Cards-Light-Green.pdf>
  - Many more for purchase online

Brainstorm others on your own!



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## Facilitator’s notes (optional)

*Here you can add group observations, notes, or questions to follow up on in other session:*

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